Indian Progression

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INDIAN PROGRESSION.

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The work of the Presbyterian Church among the Indians is a long and inspiring story, from early Colonial efforts beginning with the Long Island Indians, to this end of the nineteenth century, when at least thirty-five tribes have been reached by it and one hundred and twenty missions and schools are in successful operation in the great West. But the end of the century sees also the significant spectacle of a tribal interchange of the blessings of the Gospel—when one band of Christian Indians carries the good news to another tribe, and the Red Man reads the Church a lesson in giving and telling.

Back in the thirties, four Nez Perce braves came across the mountains of the Northwest looking for the Book of heaven. Marcus Whitman was the answer to their appeal, and all the world knows his story if not theirs. The martyred Whitman, the Spauldings and the Cowleys served and suffered and conquered for Christ

and the Nez Perces came into the light. Overlapping the last eventful years of the Spaulding ministry the McBeth sisters entered into the very heart and life of this wonderful mission, and when at last Miss Sue went to her reward, Jonah, the sub-chief, brokenly said to General Howard, of her work, "It make Indians stop buying and selling wives, stop gambling and horse racing for money, stop getting drunk and running about, stop all time lazy and make them all time work." It did more, for she was the "theological seminary" that prepared Nez Perce young men for the ministry.

Her sister Kate, entering into her labors, carries on this unique work, and nine native pastors and more elders thus trained minister to hundreds of Nez Perce church members in Idaho alone.

But so enlightened are these awakened Indians that they are reaching out helping hands to the tribes that sit in darkness about them. Two years ago two Indians from the Fort Hall Reservation, Idaho, where 1,500 Bannocks and Shoshones have settlements around the agency, traveled to the Nez Perces for help to worship God as, long ago, the Nez Perces had appealed to the white men of the East. Then did James Hayes, a native pastor, leave his church at the bidding of his people, and go over to the more warlike Bannocks and Shoshones to preach—an Indian to his brother Indians. His was not a

new message, for a good Presbyterian woman had for years been droppin g seed into their hearts as she did a quiet work in a school at one point on the Reservation. The call to the Nez Perces was echoed through Presbytery and Synod till it reached the Board of Home Missions in the following statement:

"The committee on the Indian work on the Fort Hall Reservation herewith present the following facts and conclusions to the Synod of Utah:

"1st. Miss Amelia J. Frost, a member of the Presbyterian Church at Leroy, N. Y., was sent to the Reservation twelve years ago to take charge of the missionary work of the Connecticut Indian Association. This is an interdenominational association, and has furnished her support up to the present time (1899).

"2d. After years of self-denial and consecration to the best interests of these dark-minded heathen, she has fully gained their confidence and has been able to teach them the rudiments of the Gospel. She has induced a number of them, who were living with wives after the custom of the heathen, to abandon their wild habits, accept the customs of civilization, secure a license and enter the marriage state according to the laws and pledges of the state. They abandoned their Indian habits, threw away their blankets, moccasins, paint and feathers, and put on the garb of civilization.

"3d. A year or more ago two of these men made the journey to the Nez Perce Indians to learn how to worship God.

"The Presbyterian Indians of the Nez Perce tribe became deeply interested in the Bannock and Shoshone visitors. They sent their pastor, the Rev. James Hayes, and his elder, Solomon Whitman, to spend a few months in preaching the Gospel to the Bannock and Shoshone Indians this last summer.

"4th. Miss Frost had so well prepared the ground, and had so thoroughly won the confidence of the people that when they learned from her that the Nez Perce minister and elder worshipped the same God that she had been preaching to them, and belonged to the same denomination, they gladly received the minister and his elder. The Spirit of God accompanied the preaching of the Word. Souls were born again and wished to make a public profession of their faith.

"5th. The Presbytery of Walla Walla, from which the Rev. Mr. Hayes and his elder came, then gave them authority to organize a Presbyterian Church. They therefore proceeded, in due form, after instructing the converts in reference to doctrine and church government, to organize the First Presbyterian Church of Fort Hall, consisting of eighteen members.

"The Nez Perce Indians, who are Presbyterians, furnished the money to provide for Mr. Hayes while on his mission. In addition they

raised $298.80 to assist their new found brethren in building a house of worship. Miss Frost and her friends undertook to secure means to erect a building for the Presbyterian Church at Fort Hall. About $800 has been secured for this house of worship.

"Four members of this Synod have, at different times, visited this little company of newborn brethren. We have been deeply interested in this precious work of God, the result of the long and faithful labors of Miss Frost, and of the Nez Perce brethren who have come to her assistance. She has planted, the coming missionaries have watered and God has given the increase.

"We are profoundly convinced that God has laid these little ones of His kingdom on the bosom of the Presbyterian Church. One of our Home Missionary brethren, who knows the preciousness of this work, offers to contribute one hundred dollars of his own support to the support of a Presbyterian missionary from the Nez Perce Indians. Only $300 more will be needed to care for these trusting ones who are looking to our Church for Gospel nurture.

"Your committee, therefore, recommend that the claims of these converted Indians be laid before our Board of Home Missions, and that we ask for $300 to make provision for their spiritual life and growth."

The first step taken was the adoption of Miss Frost by the Woman's Board, with the hope

that the Nez Perce pastor might be raised up according to the call of the Synod of Utah. Then began her struggle in church building and raising the necessary funds. As the official presentment through the Synod of Utah could not give the picturesque touches of that gathering of funds by the Nez Perces, first to send their pastor and elder, and then, as an afterthought, to provide that the pastor's wife should go too, to encourage her Indian sisters, following up this visit with the substantial collection out of their own narrow resources, to start the church building fund; so the stimulating efforts of Miss Frost herself among her Indian people and her friends, with all the pathetic detail of her own sacrifices and experiences, could not be told in the limits of this article. It is another chapter of heroic history for the great Indian epic of the future.

The Bannock and Shoshone Church walls are going up, but the brave heart of the missionary trembles before the fact that the money is not equal to the cost. Living in a tent far into the cold weather, ill though she has been, she watches and directs, writes her appealing letters and prays for help. Hear her own words: "I am willing to do without help in furnishing the house—for this year—if we can only get the building paid for. I was taught as a child to abhor debt. Perhaps I took too much risk on the building, but I felt it was what the work

here demanded. I have counted every dollar of expense. It's only a plain, substantial building —no more room than our work seems to demand. At our great distance from towns where the workmen live, it seemed imperative to have all the work done at one time. I felt we could do without a tower. Then word came from the Government School that the Christian Endeavor Society (Indian) and the Junior Endeavorers and employes were trying to get a bell. It is the Lord's work—'The silver and the gold are his'—and from the first I've prayed over the matter every step.

"When this word came I felt it was an indication that I ought to have the tower built, for if the building was finished without, it would be three days' work of carpenter to cut out the cornice, etc., before commencing construction of tower. The children wouldn't want to put their money in the *building*—they want to hear the bell ring out, 'Come to church,' 'Come to church,' as our Government Inspector's wife had told them when speaking in Christian Endeavor meeting. I know all the dear boys and girls, and when I was there I told them I hoped they would hear it ring, 'Come to Jesus.'

"I have written letters soliciting funds whenever I have had strength to do so after the 'at hand' work was done. One of the men came to my tent, summoned me out, and pointing to the framework, just raised, of our tower and spire,

said, 'What this day you call it?' I replied, '26th day of October,' and he said, 'All time you heap savvy this day—first time any house talk our Father on this Reservation.' Pointing his finger upward, to indicate the spire, pointing heavenward, he said, translated from Indian, 'Any man on train, any man on wagon road seeing that, know Indians are Christians on this Reservation. My heart is glad now, all the people passing will know now that is an "Our Father's" house.' I don't know where a dollar to pay for it is coming from, but I believe the Lord does and I cannot but feel I was right in having it built. The estimate on tower, with no arrangement as to hanging bell, is $238."

Does it not seem as if *some one* would wish to help that valiant builder—a solitary woman, another Sue McBeth for the Bannocks and Shoshones?

And there is a sequel. While the light is just dawning over Fort Hall Reservation, there is a cry out of heathen darkness five hundred miles south of these tribes of the Northwest. A Government teacher at the Shebitts' School at St. George, Utah, was until recently a Presbyterian missionary in a mission school among the Mormons. Once a missionary, always a missionary. She writes to Miss Frost, who is going in and out among the Bannocks and Shoshones in their new capacity as Presbyterian Church members, of the need of her Shebitts, and of the scattered

tribes over the border of Nevada. Will the new-made elders of the little church come down to these Indian brethren with the Gospel message as the Nez Perces came to them? What a request, when their own church building was struggling up! But they *went*, and Miss Frost with them, and Nez Perce James Hayes after them. Miss Work, the Government teacher, writing of the visiting Indians from Nevada points—the Kaibabs, Muddies, Cedars and others, says: "Miss Frost, with Hubert and Alexander Watson, two of her elders, came down from Ross Fork and James Hayes of the Nez Perces is to follow. I cannot express the joy that is ours as we see the people struggling so patiently to understand and coming so faithfully night after night with all the children to hear the great 'te guin ap' (story). The St. George paper last week announced that a Presbyterian mission has been established at Conger's Farm (their name for this place), by what authority I do not now know, but I begin to think it may prove a prophecy of what is coming."

And so from Nez Perces to Bannocks and Shoshones, from Bannocks and Shoshones to Utah and Nevada tribes, the Gospel progression lights up the dark corners of our country, while the dusky torchbearers show to a lagging church how the light *might* be turned on were its own response as prompt and earnest.

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